To The Rescue

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Raphael has a WONDERFUL time, Leonardo is sure this will strike him as funny tomorrow, and Donatello attempts to beat Michelangelo at his own game. Rated for a a bit of language and violence.

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Author's Notes: This story is one of three in a series I've been calling "Quality Time." They are one part character study and two parts pure unadulterated fun. Each is written as two juxtaposed oneshots meant to take place at about the same time. Millions of thanks to Winnychan, who beta-read. Have fun, and remember to review.

Disclaimer: I do not own *TMNT, Wayne's World* , "Bohemian Rhapsody", *Super Mario Brothers* , Kermit the Frog, or anything else in this story, nor do I make money off of this. I am totally broke.

Leonardo landed lightly on the roof of the grocery store, pausing to see if his brother was aware of him. Raphael sat on the edge of the building, rubbing his eyes and showing no sign of having perceived his brother's presence. It had been that way most of the night as the de facto leader of the turtles had followed his brother in secret to and from Casey's apartment, except for a period of about forty-five minutes in which he had lost track of him. He had just now found him, and was curious as to what had happened, particularly since Raphael had been sitting silently in almost plain sight for the past minute and a half. It wasn't the desirably ninja-esque behavior he had hoped his brother adopted during his midnight excursions. Leo edged forward silently, keeping to the shadows until he was inches from his brother. He was more concerned than before—Raph should have noticed him long ago. Instead, his brother kept alternating between rubbing his eyes and blinking, feet swinging aimlessly over the open air above the sleepless street. After a moment, he stopped to run his hands over his face and take a deep, shaky breath.

"Y'okay?" Leo asked softly.

Raph jumped a mile. "Oh god," he whimpered.

Which was...weird. Raph wasn't a whimpering kind of guy.

"It's all right, Raph, it's me." Leo slipped up to sit beside his brother. "Y'okay?" he repeated.

Raph buried his face in his hands, drawing his knees up to his chest and resting his heels on the edge of the rooftop. "M'fine," he mumbled.

"Uh-huh," Leo said thoughtfully. He leaned in to inspect Raph's hands, which were twitching slightly.

Raph issued a muffled warning. "Don't get too close."

"Why not?" Leo gripped Raph's right wrist and brought it away from his face, checking his pulse. It was racing. "What happened to you?"

Raph yanked his wrist from Leo's grip and shuffled a few more inches away from his brother. Leo glanced down at his hand and rubbed his fingers together. There he encountered a thin layer of fine white powder.

"Don't tell Splinter," said Raph. All at once his eyes seemed to lose focus, and a smile spread across his face.

Leo looked up at his brother. "What happened?"

"Druuuuug bust. In more ways than one." Raph chortled.

It was then that Leo understood. He shifted to his knees and pulled Raph's hands away from his face. "Look at me." Raph's brown eyes focused in on him, red from some irritation, but they couldn't seem to do so without making giggles bubble out of his throat. The pupils were so huge that they nearly overwhelmed the irises. Leo sighed and wiped powder away from the fabric under his brother's eyes with his thumbs. "You're high as a kite."

"Mmmmmmmmm-hm," Raph hummed musically. "Don't tell Splinter."

"How on earth did this happen?" Leo sincerely hoped that Raph wasn't this way on purpose.

"I ran inta a drug dealer. He threw one-a the baggies at me. It busted open. Drugs went everywhere. I came here 'cause I didn't want anyone to find out. I mean, like, I didn't want you to find out, 'cause then you'd all make fun a' me, and I'd never, ever convince you to..." His voice acquired a slight warble, which he straightened out with a cough. "To respect me, 'cause I know how I act a lot of the time, but I really, really think you're the greatest and I...Leo, listen...it would mean a lot to me if I could earn your respect, and we could respect each other." He smiled and gave Leo a hug.

Leo stared straight ahead. He felt like he was standing a foot or two away, *watching* himself get hugged by a very emotional Raph. His brain didn't even register an emotion. He just watched, well outside of his own body, with the disinterest of a Trekkie at a Star Wars convention. Then, all at once, his eyes grew to the size of pancakes, and shifted downward to confirm that yes, his brother's carapace was directly beneath his line of vision. His sense of touch kicked in, and yes, Raphael was definitely hugging him. His sense of smell picked up his brother's scent, his left ear heard the whuffle of too-fast breath right underneath it, and as his sense of taste came back, he twitched against the aftertaste of the experimental spaghetti Mikey had made as an evening snack. His senses were back, his ability to speak was there, but his jumbled mind caused his mouth to produce a simple but effective "Hfuth?"

"So I came here," Raph concluded in Leo's ear.

Leo knew the response to that one. "Where, of course, you are virtually invisible." His eyes glanced over his shoulder at the busy street. He stood, but since Raph adamantly refused to let go of him, he dragged his brother to his feet as well. Gently, he dislodged Raph and held him at arm's length. "We'll have to get back now. We can't risk anyone finding you in this condition."

Raph snorted. "What condition? I can take care a' myself."

"Not in this condition, you don't," Leo argued. A thought occurred to him, and he felt like he'd swallowed his own tongue. "I...gosh, Raph,

how much did you inhale?"

"Mmmmmmm..." the younger turtle sang, apparently enjoying the vibrations it made in his resonating cavities, "a lot."

"What if you overdosed?" He pressed two fingers to Raph's carotid artery to check his pulse again, covering Raph's forehead with his other hand at the same time to check his temperature. Finding him a little warm, and his pulse still racing, he murmured, "You have got to be more careful!" He reached out for his arm to lead him away.

Raph beat him to it, hooking an arm around Leo's neck and cuddling against him. Leo came very close to being utterly shocked, but didn't have the time to do so before Raph said something that shocked him even more. "I know," rumbled the younger turtle. "Ya think I don't know I'm reckless and impulsive? I know how worried ya get when I do stupid things, and I wantcha to know I'm sorry. I don't mean to make you worry. I love you, bro."

All right...the lecturing wasn't effective, so in that way he was no different than he was when he was sober. The difference here was that he was so...sweet. Leo switched tactics. "Just...humor me, okay?" He returned the embrace gently, seeing that Raph wasn't planning to let go. "I'm going crazy here," he admitted. "I want to be sure you're okay."

"Then go crazy," Raph snorted. "You're more fun when you're crazy anyway. I really like you when you're crazy. Heck, I like you anyway, but you're just *awesome* when you go nuts, Leo, I can't even say it. Like when we were trying to make a coup on the Foot headquarters?" He swayed a little and suddenly looked concerned. "Hey Leo, I'm swayin'."

Now Leo was scared. He knew how he would deal with brutal, angry Raph. He even knew how to handle nearly-psychotic Raph. But Raph was being so irrational, so strange, and yet so *nice* that Leo really wasn't sure what to do. After a moment of deliberation in which he filed Raph's comments into a secret cabinet in his brain that he

would come back to later, he decided on brute honesty. "So you're perfectly willing to let someone from the Foot or the cops or God alone knows who else find you, high beyond all reason and totally incapacitated? Raph, you've got to understand, I am *physically incapable* of letting that happen, as much as it would serve you right for being such an idiot."

That got through. Raph's was silent for a moment. "I'm gettin' in troooooublllle..." His voice sounded so plaintive that it was pitiful.

Leo shook his head, deciding that a little compromise would be worth his brother's cooperation. "No, you won't. I'm not telling anyone."

"Tell 'em ya rescued me? The progdig'l son?" He snorted. "Hear that, Leo? I ain't even worth rescuin'. Can't even say progdig—that word."

"You're worth rescuing, Raph," Leo said patiently, "and trust me, they won't hear about this." He was stretching the truth to a fine line. His family wasn't going to hear about this *until morning* . After that, Leo was sure this whole episode would suddenly strike him as funny.

After a brief moment of hesitation, Raph took one shaky step forward. Since his arms were around his brother, Leo was pulled along with him. "Steady," Leo said softly, not just fearing that Raph would collapse, but that he would drag him down with him.

Raph was crying tearlessly. "Yer such a good brother to me, y'know? I ever say that?"

No he, hadn't, and Leo doubted he would ever say it again. "You don't need to, Raph." He plucked himself from Raph's embrace and threaded one arm across the back of his brother's shell, holding Raph's arm across his shoulders with his other hand. Their fingers tangled, and Raph sobbed.

"I thought...I thoughcha didn't care, butcha do. I mean, I always knew you cared, but sometimes I forgot. And Leo, sometimes I say that Casey's my best friend, or Mikey, but the truth is, none of us have a

better friend than you. You're always there for us, you look out for us, you make sure we get through it all...we never appreciate you enough. And I hate letting you down, I hate failing my family, 'cause I love you guys so much..." Then his eyes darkened. "It's too hot out here," he panted. "I can't breathe. I'm sayin' stuff I don't mean." Then he shattered. "I can't say that! I love you, man!"

"I love you, too," Leo replied evenly, concentrating hard to remember everything Raph was saying and wishing desperately for a video camera, or a tape recorder. He wanted to play this for Raph every time he was difficult. Every. Single. Time. And laugh very hard. *No, don't grin. This is a very serious situation.*

Suddenly, he was pulled into a hug again, slamming him into a halt, and a lipless mouth, in a completely fraternal and platonic way, kissed him firmly on the cheek. "You're the greatest," Raph whuffled in his ear.

Leo began to doubt his own constitution. This just might be the end of him.

Michelangelo watched as Donatello squished three mushrooms in a row. "You ever wonder why you have to fight mushrooms, but the princess you're rescuing is named Toadstool?"

"Toadstools aren't mushrooms," Donatello pointed out, eyes never leaving the television screen. He was having a little trouble in that his thick fingers weren't precisely ideal for working the buttons on the controller. He was nevertheless glad that Mikey had thought to dig out this old game system. A few tweaks and it worked just fine.

"Oh." Mikey went back to watching as Luigi nabbed a flashing star. "So, aren't toadstools the bad kind?"

"Yes."

"Then why isn't it Princess Mushroom?"

Donnie blinked and looked over, pausing the game. This called for a time-out. "What?"

"Dude, you're right over a big pit. You're gonna fall in when you un-pause it."

Donnie wasn't going to let this pass. "Why should it be Princess Mushroom?"

"'Cause toadstools are bad, dude. You should be fighting toadstools and rescuing mushrooms. Thus, Princess Mushroom."

"If you wanna call her Princess Mushroom from now on, I won't stop you." Donnie resumed the game, ensuring that Luigi made it safely over the pit. The game continued for a while in silence, until Donatello made it to the end of the level. It was then that Mikey chose to bring up the big, important question.

"What would you do if you were waiting around to be rescued?"

Donnie snorted. "I don't think I'd call it waiting."

"Why not? You're sitting in a castle with no one around, there's a big monster somewhere but he's no conversationalist...don't you get bored?"

"When my life is in danger?"

"Yeah!"

"I don't think I'd be bored. I think I'd be trying to get out of there."

"But you're Princess Toadst...Mushroom, man! You can't save yourself!"

"Well, we never established that. You just asked me what I'd do if I was waiting to be rescued." Donnie paused the game again. "Is this really bothering you?"

"It's called making conversation, Donnie. It happens sometimes."

"When it happens with you," Donatello said with a small smile, "we don't call it conversation. We call it a test of endurance." He pointed to the television screen. "Your turn, Mario. Remember the bet."

Mikey harrumphed at that and looked back at the television screen for a moment. Suddenly, he piped up with, "Do you ever resent that you also fight *turtles* in this game?"

"I think of 'em as tortoises."

"Oh."

Stupid drug dealers and their stupid expensive cars. Raphael's eye ridges sank so low that they nearly covered his eyes. A kid and a guy were talking, and the guy was obviously rich, and obviously carrying something he didn't want to be seen. This was confirmed when he pulled out a bag full of pills of a color Mikey might call "migraine pink" and handed them to the kid in exchange for another bag, this one full of white powder. These guys were about to get a summer course in The Effect of Raphael's Knuckles on the Skulls of Anyone Who Ticks Him Off. He leapt from the shadows.

His sudden landing before dealer and druggie caused a pleasing reaction: they both froze in abject terror. He paused for a moment, knees bent, then straightened, flipping a sai expertly over the backs of the fingers of his right hand. "You guys should be ashamed a' yourselves," he said casually. "Kids died in Guatemala just so you could get your fix. Or your Mercedes-Benz," he tagged on musically, his eyes meeting those of the dealer.

Oh yeah. He loved justice.

The druggie—just a kid—fell back, clutching his bag of pink pills close to his chest. Raphael's eyes snapped toward him. "Got nothin' against you, kid. Go get help. It ain't worth your life, and..." his eyes

narrowed, and a savage grin spread over his face, "...believe me, you don't wanna see me again."

It wasn't that Raph intended to hurt the kid. He was only trying to scare him into checking himself into rehab. He surprised Raph a little—he didn't look like your average druggie, some high school failure or social junkie. He might have been in college. The drug dealer, in the meantime, a well-groomed man in his early thirties, was, very slowly, moving his hand toward his waist. So he had a gun. Not for long.

The movement was almost imperceptible. Raph flattened the man, planted a foot on his chest, and leaned over him. "Lookin' for this?" he sneered, holding up a pistol with his left hand. Yep. He didn't know what sex was like, but it couldn't be better than being a ninja.

The dealer swallowed, eyes wide, and groped along the ground for a weapon. Raph leaned in, holding his sai close to the man's face. "So how much ya got stashed in that car?"

" *Why?" whispered the dealer. "Ya want some?"*

Now, Raph had to give the man credit. He was a jerk who wouldn't get a respectable job, but he had guts to say that to a green midget with a turtle shell and Japanese weapons who clearly had him at a disadvantage. He was also apparently filthy rich enough to throw away his own drugs. And shortly after delivering this courageous one-liner, he did so.

POW!

White. Powder. Everywhere.

Ugh, it was in his mouth. Ugh, it was in his nose. He couldn't breathe. He staggered back, coughing and trying not to inhale, or swallow, but it was everywhere *, on his skin, clogging his throat and nose, and he coughed and coughed and gasped and sneezed and gulped and coughed and tried to inhale, but only ended up snuffling*

the powder further up his nose, whatever, man, if he got high at least he could breathe. He coughed, and it was in his mouth, and it tasted HORRIBLE, oh sweet Moses, Jacob, and Isaac, it was the most mouth-shriveling nauseatingly PAINFUL stuff to taste, and he spat and his arms flailed, trying to clear a pocket of air that was safe to breathe. He heard the screech of tires and knew that the jerk had gotten away, and it was all over him, and he tried to brush it off his skin, shuddering at the feel of the powder against his fingers, between his fingers, and he felt so...friggin'...stupid.

He really hoped that Leo would never find out about this.

They had made it down to the ground, at least. That was a real accomplishment, considering the fact that Raph kept clinging to Leo and trying to cuddle while they were walking—an impossibility, and Leo kept tripping over his suddenly affectionate sibling. Leo gritted his teeth as they landed in the alley and yanked his brother in the right direction.

"It's not easy bein' greeeeen," Raph sang softly, as he'd done for the past few minutes. "The same color as the leeeeeaves..."

Leo smacked the back of his head lightly. "Stop it." He normally thought of himself as a patient turtle, but this was...too much.

"Ow. It's a good song, Leo," Raph objected. He paused, thinking. "Um, what's the next line? I don't think I ever learned it."

The older turtle sighed and dragged his brother along. There was a manhole around the corner. If they could make it to the end of the alley, it would only be about twenty more feet of hearing the Lament of Kermit before the safety of the sewer.

"So," he began mildly, trying to make light conversation, "what did you and Casey do tonight?" Raph didn't usually talk to him in a conversational manner, and maybe his inebriated state would help him open up.

"Watched a movie. Casey's pick tonight."

"What movie?"

"Ummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm," Raph drew out the utterance for as long as he had breath, probably enjoying the vibrations again. Upon nearly running out of breath, he clipped, "Wayne's World."

"Okay." That gave Leo something to work with. "Do you remember all the words to--"

His brother beat him to it. "Is this the real life? Is this a fantasy?" Raph swayed dangerously as he sang.

Leo caught him, but couldn't stop his momentum and ended up swaying with him. He joined in. "Caught in a landslide, no escape from reality..."

"Dun-dun da dun-dun," Raph continued, giggling. He tilted his head back, losing himself in laughter. "I don't know the words to that, either."

"Sure ya do," Leo coaxed, "we'll just skip ahead. Mama, I just killed a man..." They were singing together again. "Put a gun against his head, pulled the trigger, now he's dead."

"MAMAAAAA!" Raph shrieked an octave higher than his brother, throwing all caution to the wind and causing Leo to shush him while choking back violent giggles of his own. "LIFE HAS JUST BEGUUUUN! AN' NOW I'M GONNA THROW IT ALLLL AWAAAAAAAAAAAY!"

They turned the corner to find ten Purple Dragons waiting for them.

"So what if they aren't mushrooms after all? What if they're toadstools, and you're killing Princess Toadstool's relatives?"

"I thought we were calling her Princess Mushroom."

"Get real, Donnie, it's a serious question."

Donatello could hardly believe what he was hearing. "Get real? *Get real?* Mikey, you're asking me if a video game involves the regicide of FUNGI which are theoretically related to an apparently perfectly human member of the royal family!"

"Her dad has a shroom on his head, dude!"

Donnie threw down his controller and flopped back against the back of the couch, turning his eyes to the ceiling. "Why, God? Why do I have a brother like this?"

"The question's legit, dude, and you know it." Mikey's lips, or equivalent thereof, tightened, as though restraining a smile.

"You know, Mikey, I sometimes wonder why you say things like this. My hypothesis is that you've been wired by some alien species to pop out the most outrageous questions and comments in order to *confuse* the rest of us into submission."

"Now who's goin' crazy?" Mikey grinned.

"Yes, I'm sure of it. You're the prototype machine from the aforementioned extraterrestrial life forms, and they're testing you out on us to see if they can conquer the world with sheer, unadulterated WTF power."

"Did you just say 'double-you tee eff?'"

"Yeah, and?"

Mikey stared at him. "You geek."

"Oh, this from the alien machine asking me if Princess Toadstool's dad is an ACTUAL toadstool."

"Hey, Princess T. could be half toadstool, for all you know."

"You know, Mikey, just shut up. Just...shut up and play the stupid game. It's your turn to kill Princess Toadstool's aunties and uncles, so go ahead."

Mikey turned back to the game and resumed playing. "So...ya think any of the mushrooms...toadstools...are girls?"

"Oh, no."

Things got even worse when Mikey lowered his voice. "How do you think they...ya know?"

"No, I don't know. I don't want to know."

"Make babies?"

Hello, thoroughly undesirable images. Donatello tried to picture bunnies. Probably not the best thing to focus about when one is trying to keep from thinking about copulation. Giving up, he addressed his brother's concern. "That's retarded, Mikey. Fungi send spores out. They don't have *sex* to reproduce."

"You were the one who said there were females."

"I didn't! I...hey, you said...wait..."

"And then there's the possibility that Her Highness is half-fungus herself...how d'you suppose that happened?"

Donnie buried his face in his hands. "I give up. I give up! Tell...yes, Mikey, yes. Some human went out and *screwed* a mushroom and BANG! Out popped Princess Toadstool!"

"I thought toadstools and mushrooms were different."

"Mikey..."

"And if her dad was really a toadstool and made sweet sweet love to her human mom..." he scrunched up his face, "...what d'you suppose that'd look like?"

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!"

"Shhhh! Master Splinter's meditating! Sh! Sh! Quit it! No fighting on the couch! No f--"

Leo froze in front of the gangsters, then slowly backed away, creating a little more space between them. He counted their number. Ten. He could handle ten. The trick would be in keeping his incapacitated brother out of the fray. Not that the Purple Dragons would be the most difficult part to manage about that trick. No drug could keep Raph from a fight.

"Y'know," Raph said loudly, teeth chattering for some reason as though he was camping in Antarctica, "I think we should... *not fight.* "

...And that was as weird as it got. Leo knew for a fact that he would never be weirded out again in his entire life. This was simply the top of the chart. It was all downhill from here. Nothing could impress him now.

"I just...I'm not feelin' it."

...Or he could be wrong.

"So," murmured one of the gangsters, idly swinging a baseball bat back and forth from his fingers, "you freaks are still around. And rollin', it looks like," he added, his mouth spreading into a wide grin.

"Okay," Leo whispered quickly to his brother, "sit down, and I'll take care of this." He never took his eyes off the Purple Dragons. Raph quietly obeyed, giving Leo's arm a final pet before sinking into a sitting position by the wall.

Leo watched the gangsters coolly. "Cut the niceties. If you want us, come on. But if you attack a warrior when he is incapable of defending himself, you are cowards." The last sentence was bait. He had no intention of letting them anywhere near Raph.

The words had their desired effect. Now the gangsters were all mad at *him* . He drew his swords as one growled and charged him.

To Leonardo, a fight was like a dance. All it took was preparation and concentration, and in the performance, he only had to do what he had been trained to do. The rest of his mind was caught up in the exhilaration of the fight. He was focused, calm, at peace, and having the freakin' time of his life.

Turn, right foot down, swing, leap, duck, left foot high kick—it was like he had been waiting to do this all night without even knowing it. Not a single Dragon escaped him. Not one was going to touch his brother.

He spun as he sensed Raph clambering to his unsteady feet. A jacketed gangster who had approached from behind—crap, Leo hadn't seen him—was jogging toward Raph with a baseball bat.

"I gotcha!" Leo called, then turned back as another gangster rushed him. There were only three left standing. If he could cut through them before...

By the time Leo was finished with the next gangster, the man attacking his brother was swinging his bat. Raph's right hand lashed out, catching the bat in his thick fist. The turtle cried out in pain. The gangster smiled and pulled a gun from his jacket.

In two front-flips, Leo was behind Raph's attacker and swinging his sword at his head. The man crumpled, headless. He spun to face the last gangster and spotted him fleeing for his life down the alley.

He heard retching noises behind him and whirled to see his brother vomiting on the pavement. Dropping swiftly to his knees beside the

ailing turtle, he gently touched his shell. "Raph?"

Raph shook his head. "Dizzy," he gasped, his attacker's blood dripping down his face.

His teeth had stopped chattering, which was probably good. Leo wiped the blood away pressed a hand to Raph's face. It was still warm. Now, Leonardo was not an expert on drugs, but he knew this couldn't be a good sign. "Let's get you back to the lair," he said softly, helping his brother to his feet and supporting him carefully.

"Hand hurts," muttered Raph as they walked. "Like a buncha little spiders."

Leo was concerned. "Raph, do I need to call for help?"

"F'get about it. I'm fine, I'm great, 't's just my...my eyesight."

"What's wrong with your eyesight?"

Raph glanced at him. "You're fuzzy."

"Fuzzy?"

"Yeah, all fuzzy bluzzy." Raph giggled.

Leo was fairly certain that the giggle was his mind playing tricks on him. They had reached the manhole, and Leo lifted the cover. "What else do you see?" he asked, setting the manhole cover aside and helping Raph down into the darkness below.

"Nuttin'." Raph's voice echoed as they descended into the sewers. Leo slid the manhole cover back into place and followed his brother, who had reached the bottom and was now sinking onto a dry pipe. "Just you an' the sewer. Everythin's blurry. An' my stomach hurts."

When he reached the floor, Leo squatted in front of his brother, squinting in the darts of light coming in through a grate above their heads. "Do you think you're going to throw up again?"

"I...don't think so." Raph twined his arms around Leo's neck and rested his head against his brother's plastron, closing his eyes sleepily.

"Raph?" Leo was concerned that, if Raph was wrong, he was going to get a lap full of vomit.

He was met by silence.

"Raph? We've got to go."

More silence, then the younger turtle tightened his hold on his brother. "Could we stay here a while?" he asked softly. "This could be the only time in my life I won't be too self-conscious ta do this."

"To do what?"

"This." Raph snuggled against his brother and sighed contentedly.

Raph obviously didn't mind how self-conscious this was making *Leo* , but the older turtle wasn't entirely certain how to say " *Get the heck off of me* " while his brother was having a spiritual experience. Taking the situation as it was, he wrapped his arms around Raph and held him tightly. Raph made a small sound, and Leo automatically yanked away, startled. Assuring himself that this was a totally fraternal thing, and that it was no different from what they did as children—very, very small children—he pried his fingers loose from the pipe behind him that he'd grabbed instinctively and hugged his brother again. To reassure himself, he rocked Raph gently, like a child.

The rocking acquired a steady rhythm, and to that rhythm, Raph quietly began to murmur, "Thunderbolts and lightning, very very frightening..."

"Y'know," Mikey announced, "I think I'd just as soon spend the time finding an artifact that keeps someone from transforming you into

stuff, 'cause finding all these scepters to transform the king back is getting really annoying."

Donnie shrugged. "It's a big part of the game."

Mikey had only gotten started. He had gotten such good reactions out of Donnie so far that he couldn't stop now. "So why don't they make it a big part of the game to go through all these places and, in the end, find something that keeps him from getting transformed into stuff?"

"Then he couldn't be transformed back into a human. Mushroom."

"Well, it'd transform him back into a mushroom at the same time."

"You didn't establish that."

Hm. Donnie suddenly had the upper hand. It could not remain so. "Ya think the big mushroom dude is Princess T's son?"

Donnie did a double-take. An actual double-take. Fifty million points to the turtle in orange! "Her SON? Mikey, that's ridiculous."

"Why? She and Mario coulda done it. Heck, Toad could be Mario's kid!"

Donnie's jaw dropped, then slowly closed. His eyes glittered, and he turned to Mikey, pausing the game. "You know, I'll bet that's it."

Mikey held his palms up. "It makes sense, doesn't it?"

"Yeah." Donnie held a finger in the air as if slowly pressing buttons on an imaginary calculator. "Princess T's dad, a mushroom--"

"Toadstool."

"Right, a toadstool, meets a beautiful woman in the field. She's hot--"

"She's Princess T's mom, so of course she's hot."

"Yes. So the mushroom--"

"Toadstool."

"--toadstool asks her out on a date. She doesn't usually date fungi, but since he's got such a cool hat, and he's a king and all, she agrees. And what do they do after their first date?"

Dramatic pause.

"A wedding, of course," continued Donnie. "They have wild sex on the beach, and nine months later, lo and behold, a half-human, half-*toadstool* child is born. But ALAS!"

Mikey had been about to interrupt, but the "alas" caught him so off guard that he held his tongue.

"Alas, for after three years of a happy marriage, Queen Toadstool enters the kitchen for a drink of water. Believing the unfortunate woman, in her fungus regalia, to be a true mushroom--"

"Toadstool."

" *Wrong!* Believing the unfortunate woman to be a true MUSHROOM, the cook sautés her and puts her on a mushroom pizza to be served to the princess that night. The princess consumes the pizza bearing her mother's corpse! But as the princess lies sleeping that night, the spirit of her mother still residing in the pieces being digested in her stomach forgives her and sorrowfully departs, leaving her daughter behind, never to remember the tender touch of a mother.

"As she grows, the princess looks so like her mother that her father forbids her any shred of happiness. In truth, he blames her for the death of her mother, for it was in the cooking of the pizza to be served to the princess that the queen perished. Aggrieved and oppressed, the teenage Toadstool turns to the arms of the dashing Mario, and they make love out of wedlock. Her father, enraged,

destroys the talisman that keeps him from being turned into...various things and demands that Mario save him every time he is turned into something other than his natural form, for only then can Mario have his daughter's hand.

"To this day, Mario has barely seen the princess or the anthropomorphic toadstool born of their forbidden love, for he is doomed to forever continue his quests, or at least until people stop trying to turn the king into things."

There was a pause, long and tangible. It could have been cut with a knife, or a word, but neither brother did. It lasted for an eternity, heavy and oppressive, the only sound the echo of the final tragic words of the unforgettable story.

"I'm not *that* dramatic," muttered Michelangelo.

Having managed to bumble past his two other brothers, who weren't paying the slightest bit of attention, get Raphael into the shower to wash the drugs and blood off his skin, and quickly pull up a search engine and thereby identify that Raphael had ingested a considerable, but not dangerous, dose of Ecstasy, Leonardo returned to the bathroom feeling very relieved. If the website was correct, Raph should be coming down fairly soon. Upon entering the bathroom, Leo stood beside his brother, who was lying on his back in the tub, staring vacantly up at the ceiling, ignoring the water, which was ricocheting off his plastron like glass ballerinas.

"How are you feeling?" Leonardo asked softly.

Raphael didn't answer. He didn't even move except to breathe.

"Raph?"

"I'm such a moron."

Leo could almost hear the crash.

"I just..."

The older turtle leaned in. "You okay?"

"I...I don't know."

Leo squatted by his brother, squinting at him slightly. "Get a little high today?"

"Shut up, ya big freak."

He was fine. Leo smiled a little. "That, little brother, was a heck of a lot of E you managed to befriend."

"Tell me about it. It was E?"

"You were plastering yourself all over me. Is there any doubt?"

Raph didn't reply. Instead, he looked cross.

Leo stood up. "You're welcome."

"What?" Raph turned his face to him as though unable to believe what he had heard.

Leo put his hands on his hips. "If it hadn't been for me, you'd be making some Purple Dragons very, very happy right now."

There was a pause, then a heavy sigh. "Thanks, Leo," Raph muttered.

Leo smiled and sat on the toilet, leaning his elbows on his knees. "Hey," he said gently, "in about six hours, we'll both be cracking up at this."

"No, I won't."

"Well, then, Mikey and I will be cracking up at this."

Raph looked anxious. "Thoughtcha weren't gonna tell."

"That was before you said 'fuzzy bluzzy.'"

Raph's eyes widened. "I said *what?* "

Chuckles escaped Leo. "You said I looked fuzzy bluzzy."

"That's wonderful. Mikey's gonna be makin' 'Fuzzy Bluzzy was a turtle' jokes. I'll never live it down."

"Darn right." Leo stretched his arms over his head, thrilled that the event was over and could be laughed about.

"Hey Leo?"

Leo returned his arms quickly to rest against his legs, leaning forward. "Yeah?"

"Thanks for...this."

Leo raised an eye ridge. "You're welcome, but you already said that."

"'Cause I had to. Now I'm sayin' it 'cause I mean it." Sincerity sparkled in Raph's eyes.

Leo was slightly uncomfortable, remembering how touchy-feely Raph was on the drugs and hoping he wasn't returning to that. "You feeling okay?"

"Yeah, Leo," Raph said poisonously. "Havin' the freakin' time of my life. I meant what I said, idiot, why's it so hard to believe? See, *this* is why it takes drugs to get me to..." He stopped and clenched his jaw.

Guilt, an old friend of Leo's, soaked into the older turtle's chest. That wouldn't do. "I'm sorry, Raph," he said softly. "I believe you."

"Ya do?"

"Yeah."

"It's just...sometimes I think there's this wall, between me an' everyone else. If I try to bust it down, it'd mean it ain't there to..."

"Protect you?"

"Somethin' like that." Raph's tone spoke more than his words, betraying the fact that Leo was right on the mark. He continued staring up at the ceiling and did not speak for several seconds. "I hate drugs, Leo," he said softly. "I hate what they do to people, I hate the people who'll sell 'em just to buy a friggin' penthouse, and I..." He closed his eyes, causing the spray that had built up in the creases of his eyelids to dribble down his face. "I just hate 'em. But..."

"Yeah?" Leo suspected that Raph, although more like himself now, was not quite free of the drug's influence. Otherwise, he wouldn't be talking like this.

"It was like that wall was just...gone. No fear. I could say what I wanted to say, and I was invincible. Know how I hate hugs?"

"Didn't think you hated them, just thought you didn't like them."

"Whatever, y'know--"

"Although that wasn't the case tonight."

"Yeah. Felt good."

"That's the idea. Otherwise, people wouldn't buy that stuff."

"But Leo..." Raph hesitated.

"You can tell me," Leo prompted him as gently as possible.

"Never mind." Raph shuffled onto his side, facing away from Leo. It was an awkward position for them to be in, resting on the bridge of

his shell, and not one that he would normally take if he had a choice. He was signaling for Leo to go away.

Leo refused to empower Raph like that and held his ground. "You were going to say that the wall's coming back?"

Silence. Then, Raph slowly turned, first his head, followed by the rest of him, until he was on his carapace again, head tilted toward Leo but eyes on the ceiling. "I...it's like I can physically feel it coming up again. And I don't wanna...I..." He blinked rapidly. "I don't wanna go back..." He suddenly sat up and slammed the water off. The waterfall above him vanished suddenly, leaving only a tiny drizzle of falling crystals that slowed and stopped. His head bowed over his bent knees, and the water running down his face changed course and spattered on the bottom of the tub. His shell glittered. He sat there, breathing consciously while Leo watched, then quietly murmured, "I don't like myself as an asshole. It...keeps me away from you guys...sometimes."

Leo was unsure what to do here. If he reached out, Raph would most likely pull away. On the other hand, Raph was making a special effort to say what was bothering him, and this time, seemed to want Leo to reach out. Acting slowly, watching for any signs of a negative reaction, he slid from the toilet to kneel by the tub and extended one hand, gently brushing Raph's shoulder with his fingertips. This caused Raph's head to snap up, his eyes to focus on his brother, but he did not resist. Leo's fingers tightened around the shoulder, holding it firmly. "Y'know, Raph, don't let this encourage you too much, but..." He paused, trying to determine whether or not to move forward with this. His brain sent him an affirmative, and he continued. "We sometimes like it when you're an asshole."

The look on Raph's face said, "You're kidding, right?"

"Not because we're masochists, but because we sometimes need someone to tell it like it is. It's sometimes the only way we know to give things a second look. As much as we all complain about it, and Mikey teases, we wouldn't have you any other way, because that's

the way you are. Naturally, we'd prefer it if you wouldn't keep pushing us away, but we're all pretty sure you'll break down that wall on your own someday, without any...highly expensive and illegal drugs." He smiled a little at the last phrase and almost continued, but stopped. There was nothing left to say.

Nothing, not even an entire night of Raph under the influence of E, could have prepared him for what happened next.

Tears welled up in Raph's eyes. He frowned and blinked rapidly, and when they dropped down onto his cheeks, he scrubbed furiously at them. Leo shook his head and pulled Raph's hands away, drawing his brother into his arms almost forcefully, not a warm cuddle, but a fierce, protective embrace. Raph resisted, then broke down completely, his broad shoulders shaking, sobs wheezing from his throat as his shaking hands locked behind Leo's neck and drew him closer. Leo's thumb gently rubbed the back of his brother's head comfortingly as Raph's forehead settled into the crook of his neck.

"Don't tell Mikey," Raph choked after a moment, sniffling.

Leo shook his head. "Of course not."

Michelangelo chomped a slice of pepperoni-and-pineapple pizza as he watched Donatello beat him at *Super Mario Brothers 3* . It was not a good day for Mike I of the Mikeish Empire of Mikeland when the Nerd of Donastan won a game Mike had conquered years ago—with Luigi, no less!

Donnie threw down the controller and stretched. "Whoo! That's over with."

And now he was making little of the victory. It was an insult! An insult!

"Know what this means, Mikey?"

Mikey knew exactly what it meant. He'd hoped Donnie had forgotten the bet.

Donnie crossed his legs on the coffee table, tucked his hands behind his head, and closed his eyes contentedly. "All right, go on. I'll be right behind you. Don't start till I get there."

The door to Splinter's room opened to reveal a rather nervous-looking Michelangelo with a smiling Donatello behind him. Splinter, interrupted from his meditations, opened his eyes as Mikey took a deep breath.

Mikey bowed hastily. "Um...sensei? I..."

Donnie nudged him from behind.

"I..."

Splinter raised his eyebrows. "Yes, my son?"

Mikey blew out his breath, then drew another one. "I sorta spilled milk on your antique weapons in the dojo."

Another nudge from Donnie.

"Chocolate milk. With cookie crumbs in it from dipping Oreos. All over. And I tried to get Donnie to clean it up. But we played Mario instead."

There was a pause. Mikey cringed, certain that he was doomed.

Splinter heaved a sigh and closed his eyes. "We will deal with this in the morning, Michelangelo."

What?

"What?" Mikey said aloud.

"It is late. We will speak of this tomorrow. Now allow me to meditate."

Michelangelo sent up a silent Hallelujah.

The two brothers ducked out of the room. As the door closed behind them, Mikey grinned at Donnie.

Donnie gave him a nod. "You sure got off easy."

"Oh, he'll kill me in the morning. Trust me. But you won't be there to see it."

"Oh, I'll see it. Even if I have to stay up all night."

"In that case...wanna be Luigi again?"

"You read my mind."

Author's Notes: I was dreading writing this at first, as it is impossible to come up with a story between Leo and Raph that hasn't been done before, but I think it went relatively well. Millions of thanks and warm fuzzies go out to Winnychan, who beta-read this for me and coached me through a crash course in Ecstasy. Remember to review!